



EXECUTIVE COMPUTING

HILLEL
SEGAL

AT&T, Compaq safe alternatives to IBM PC

What's so special about the IBM PC? It's certainly not technically superior to the competition. Nor is it the prettiest or the easiest to use. In fact, if its name didn't include the letters "IBM," it probably would have been ignored by the marketplace.

Like it or not, the IBM PC family of products has become the standard for the small-computer industry. More have been sold for business purposes than any other machine. More business software is available for its operating system than any other. And the greatest number of dealers and programmers support it. All this builds confidence, in the minds of people, that it is a safe and reliable investment.

I agree that it is a wise choice, as do many corporate buyers who are quick to trot out the saying: "No one ever got fired for buying IBM."

But let's not go overboard. IBM equipment is not necessarily the best choice in *all* situations.

In particular, the AT&T PC 6300 and the Compaq Deskpro 286 are two very attractive alternatives.

In the discussion below, "PC clone" refers to machines with two floppy disk drives, "XT clone" means machines with a built-in 10 Megabyte hard disk, and "AT clones" are the faster models with a 20 Megabyte (or larger) hard disk.

All are designed to run the same software as IBM machines and accept the same expansion boards.

A "Cadillac XT"

The classiest XT clone yet seen is the "enhanced" AT&T PC 6300. It has the look and feel of luxury, with price and performance that is very competitive with the IBM XT. The cabinet

is attractive, the keyboard almost silent, and the basic machine includes both serial and parallel ports (vs. just a parallel port with the standard XT).

It also has two more available slots for expansion boards than the equivalent IBM model. The 6300 is a speed demon compared to the XT, but is not in the AT league. (It runs about 70 percent of the speed of the IBM AT. However, a faster version called the "6300 Plus" was just announced to compete with the AT). Here's a factual rundown:

- ✓ **Cost:** \$4,885 (Compared to \$4,970 for a similarly configured IBM XT with 512 K of memory).
- ✓ **Speed:** Benchmarked at twice the speed of an IBM XT, according to AT&T.
- ✓ **User Comment:** "For about the same price as the IBM XT, this machine provides much more value. More expansion slots and the extra port sure come in handy, and the difference in speed is dramatic. In addition, a color screen is available that's much better than IBM's standard monitor. All in all, a great machine!"
- ✓ **My Review:** Perhaps the only company that has the resources to take on IBM — and win — is AT&T. Although the PC 6300 is only about a year old, it already is gaining ground in a crowded market. It is one of the "safest" buys next to IBM. Good for users who want improvements over the IBM XT with little risk.

An "Oldsmobile AT"

One of the first machines offered to emulate the faster IBM AT was the Deskpro 286 from Compaq.

It is quite a challenger. By speeding up the clock rate of the processor, it is even quicker than the AT for most types of applications. And because many dealers offer it side-by-side with IBM products, it is easy to make direct comparisons to make sure the programs you plan to run operate identically. Also offered is a portable version, but we chose to compare the desktop color version, which seems most popular.

- ✓ **Cost:** \$6,254 with 30 MB drive plus \$699 for a built-in 10 MB tape backup. (This compares with \$6,719 for the IBM AT with a 20 MB drive and no tape backup.)
 - ✓ **Speed:** Estimated by Compaq at 30 percent faster than the AT.
 - ✓ **User Comment:** "I bought the machine, first of all, because it was so highly recommended by my computer dealer. I've yet to find any incompatibility with IBM programs or hardware. The tape backup is a life-saver. Looking back, it looks like I made a good decision."
 - ✓ **My Review:** Compaq is one of the most stable and reliable of all the companies making PC clones. Its equipment is noted for its dependability. The Model 286 offers significant extra utility with its 30 MB hard drive and backup tape. Worthy of serious consideration, especially if you have a need for the extra storage.
- Needless to say, if you are shopping for a small computer and are not committed to "buying IBM," there are many other good choices available. In next week's column, I'll continue my review of good machines that emulate the IBM personal computers.

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant and editor of the Executive Computing Newsletter, published by the Association of Computer Users. He can be reached at ACU, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder 80301.